

HEALTH

Restless Legs Syndrome

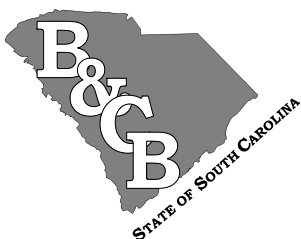
Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS) is a neurological disorder characterized by unpleasant sensations in the legs and an uncontrollable urge to move when at rest in an effort to relieve these feelings. RLS sensations are often described by people as burning, creeping, tugging, or like insects crawling inside the legs. Often called paresthesias (abnormal sensations) or dysesthesias (unpleasant abnormal sensations), the sensations range in severity from uncomfortable to irritating to painful. The most distinctive or unusual aspect of the condition is lying down and trying to relax activates the symptoms. As a result, most people with RLS have difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep. Left untreated, the condition causes exhaustion and daytime fatigue. Many people with RLS report that their job, personal relations, and activities of daily living are strongly affected as a result of their exhaustion. They are often unable to concentrate, have impaired memory, or fail to accomplish daily tasks.

Some people with RLS will not seek medical attention, believing that they will not be taken seriously, that their symptoms are too mild, or that their condition is not treatable. Some physicians wrongly attribute the symptoms to nervousness, insomnia, stress, arthritis, muscle cramps, or aging. Although the syndrome may begin at any age, even as early as infancy, most patients who are severely affected are middle-aged or older.

Treatment for Restless Legs Syndrome is symptomatic. Massage and application of cold compresses may provide temporary relief. Medications such as temazepam, levodopa/carbidopa, bromocriptine, pergolide mesylate, oxycodone, propoxyphene, and codeine are effective in relieving the symptoms. However, many of these medications have side effects. Current research suggests correction of iron deficiency may improve symptoms for some patients. Restless Legs Syndrome is a life-long condition for which there is no cure. Symptoms may gradually worsen with age, and their most disabling feature is the onset of sleep insomnia, which can be severe. Unfortunately, no one drug is effective for everyone with RLS. What may be helpful to one individual may actually worsen symptoms for another. In addition, medications taken regularly may lose their effect, making it necessary to change medications periodically.

Contact the Restless Leg Syndrome Foundation at www.rls.org to receive more information.

Source: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke



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